



99TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

State of Illinois

2015 and 2016

HB4666

by Rep. Mary E. Flowers

SYNOPSIS AS INTRODUCED:

105 ILCS 5/27-21.5 new

Amends the School Code. Beginning with the 2017-2018 school year, allows public schools to include in their curriculum, for students in grades 3 through 12, a course in the history and literature of the Old Testament era and a course in the history and literature of the New Testament era. Provides that the purpose of such courses shall be to teach and study the Old and New Testaments and to familiarize students with the contents of the Old and New Testaments, the history recorded by the Old and New Testaments, the literary style and structure of the Old and New Testaments, the customs and cultures of the peoples and societies recorded in the Old and New Testaments, and the influence of the Old and New Testaments upon law, history, government, literature, art, music, customs, morals, values, and culture. Requires the State Board of Education to adopt a curriculum for each course. Sets forth provisions concerning course requirements, personnel, and monitoring. Effective immediately.

LRB099 18116 NHT 42482 b

FISCAL NOTE ACT
MAY APPLY

A BILL FOR

1 AN ACT concerning education.

2 **Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois,**
3 **represented in the General Assembly:**

4 Section 1. Findings and policy. The General Assembly finds
5 the following:

6 (1) The Bible has been of great influence in the
7 history of the world and of the United States in the arts,
8 music, literature, and laws, on civilization, and as part
9 of the story of man's struggles throughout history.

10 (2) The United States Supreme Court, in *Stone v.*
11 *Graham*, 449 U.S. 39 (1980), noted in its decision that "the
12 Bible may constitutionally be used in an appropriate study
13 of history, civilization, ethics, comparative religion, or
14 the like".

15 (3) In a landmark case of prayer in the public schools,
16 the United States Supreme Court decision of *Abington*
17 *Township School District v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963),
18 written for the majority by Justice Tom Clark, noted,
19 "Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the
20 Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as a part
21 of a secular program of education, may not be effected
22 consistently with the First Amendment.".

23 (4) Justice Clark also stated, "In addition, it might
24 well be said that one's education is not complete without a

1 study of comparative religion or the history of religion
2 and its relationship to the advancement of civilization. It
3 certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study for
4 its literary and historic qualities.".

5 (5) Public school courses involving the study of the
6 Bible have spread to at least 43 states, and at least 7
7 state legislatures (Oklahoma, Missouri, Arizona,
8 Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, and Texas) have approved laws
9 encouraging some form of Bible study.

10 It is, therefore, the policy of the State of Illinois that,
11 in seeking to provide the best education for this State's
12 students, a course in the Bible for purposes of learning of its
13 influence on the arts, music, civilizations, the Founding
14 Fathers, presidents, ethics, history, and the laws of our
15 federal and State governments would be of good educational
16 benefit to our students.

17 Section 5. The School Code is amended by adding Section
18 27-21.5 as follows:

19 (105 ILCS 5/27-21.5 new)

20 Sec. 27-21.5. Courses in history and literature of the Old
21 and New Testament eras.

22 (a) Beginning with the 2017-2018 school year, public
23 schools may include in their curriculum, for students in grades
24 3 through 12, a course in the history and literature of the Old

1 Testament era and a course in the history and literature of the
2 New Testament era. The purpose of such courses shall be to
3 teach and study the Old and New Testaments and to familiarize
4 students with the contents of the Old and New Testaments, the
5 history recorded by the Old and New Testaments, the literary
6 style and structure of the Old and New Testaments, the customs
7 and cultures of the peoples and societies recorded in the Old
8 and New Testaments, and the influence of the Old and New
9 Testaments upon law, history, government, literature, art,
10 music, customs, morals, values, and culture.

11 (b) No later than May 1, 2017, the State Board of Education
12 shall adopt a curriculum for each course under this Section,
13 including objectives, reading materials, and lesson plans,
14 which has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of
15 this subsection (b).

16 The book or collection of books commonly known as the Old
17 Testament shall be the basic text for the course in the history
18 and literature of the Old Testament era, and the book or
19 collection of books commonly known as the New Testament shall
20 be the basic text for the course in the history and literature
21 of the New Testament era. In addition, students may be assigned
22 a range of reading materials for the courses, including
23 selections from secular historical and cultural works and
24 selections from other religious and cultural traditions. The
25 courses shall familiarize students with the customs and
26 cultures of the times and places referred to in the Old and New

1 Testaments. The courses shall familiarize the students with the
2 methods and tools of writing at the times the Old and New
3 Testament books were written, the means by which they were
4 preserved, the languages in which they were written and into
5 which they were translated, and the historical and cultural
6 events that led to the translation of the Old and New
7 Testaments into the English language. School districts may
8 recommend which version of the Old or New Testament is to be
9 used in the course, provided that the teacher of the course
10 must not be required to adopt that recommendation but may use
11 the recommended version or another version. No student may be
12 required to use one version as the sole text of the Old or New
13 Testament. If a student desires to use as the basic text a
14 different version of the Old or New Testament from that chosen
15 by the school district or teacher, the student must be
16 permitted to do so.

17 The courses provided for in this Section shall:

18 (1) be taught in an objective and non-devotional manner
19 with no attempt made to indoctrinate students as to either
20 the truth or falsity of the biblical materials or texts
21 from other religious or cultural traditions;

22 (2) not include the teaching of religious doctrine or
23 sectarian interpretation of the Bible or of texts from
24 other religious or cultural traditions;

25 (3) not disparage or encourage a commitment to a set of
26 religious beliefs; and

1 (4) not disparage or criticize the content within the
2 Old and New Testaments.

3 (c) The provisions of this Code relating to personnel
4 employed by a school district, including, without limitation,
5 licensure requirements, employment, and supervision, shall
6 apply to persons who teach the courses provided for in this
7 Section. In addition, no person may be assigned to teach such
8 courses based in whole or in part on any religious test,
9 profession of faith or lack thereof, prior or present religious
10 affiliation or lack of affiliation, or criteria involving
11 particular beliefs or lack thereof about the Bible. Except as
12 specified in this subsection (c), the qualifications and
13 training of teachers shall be determined by the school board.

14 (d) A school board may make such arrangements for
15 monitoring the content and teaching of the course in the
16 history and literature of the Old Testament era and the course
17 in the history and literature of the New Testament era as it
18 deems appropriate.

19 Section 99. Effective date. This Act takes effect upon
20 becoming law.